



How to have a

# James

Faith that Works



Devotional – Wk3

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a silver adjustable wrench. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the fingers wrapped around the handle. The wrench is held horizontally, with its head pointing towards the right. The background is a plain, light color.

# I need a faith that works

## *It's time to start applying a faith that works*

Chapter one gave us an overview of the ideas that James taught, and then James dives in a little deeper to each idea starting in chapter two. He shows how our internal faith in God is worked out practically in everyday life. How faith works.

At the close of chapter one, James instructs us that *"Pure religion and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world."* (James 1:27)

Chapter two expands on this thought with some ideas that echo the Golden Rule that Jesus taught:

*"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* *Matthew 7:21 (NASB)*

That means No Favouritism. In church, we should never play favourites. In the world, the wealthy and powerful are treated with more respect and deference than those in poverty. When a person you meet has something that can help you (money, abilities, or power), it is easy to treat them well. However, when that person has nothing to offer you or is dirty and doesn't smell good, it is not in our nature to show them deference.

Reflection: How have you been tempted to favour certain people over others? Do you equally talk to everyone, or only those with whom you feel comfortable and relate easily? What about those who feel uncomfortable in church. Do you go out of your way to make them feel comfortable?



# I need a faith that works

## *We've been given a New Nature*

The good news is that God has given us a new nature. As we learn to live into that new nature, we have to apply what Jesus said to our everyday lives.

Part of that is how we treat other people.

*"My brothers and sisters, do not show favouritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favour on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"* James 1:1-5

When we treat everyone like we would like to be treated regardless of what they can offer us, we are showing them how Jesus would treat them. Not only fulfilling the Golden Rule, but also what Jesus called the greatest commandment.

Remember, the greatest Commandment:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is, Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other command greater than these."* Mark 12:30-31

Resisting the urge to show favouritism is loving your neighbour as yourself.

*Reflection:* What about your relationships with your neighbour? How are you able to climb the fence that often separates you?

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## *One Sin or Many – Still a Sinner*

James completes the instructions on not showing favouritism with a note that showing favouritism is a sin. And, by extension, anyone who shows favouritism is a sinner. It doesn't matter what the sin is, when we commit even one sin (whether we think it is big or small), we are sinners and separated from a holy God.

*"For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all."* James 2:10

However, as we learn from the prophets, God has told us, "mercy triumphs over judgment."

Almost all of the rest of the chapter is about the mingling of two parts of Christianity: Faith and Works. However, in between James admonishing about the sin of favouritism and the section on faith and works, there are two verses:

*"Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."* James 2:12-13

These two verses actually make more sense than it seems at first. The first half of the chapter is about how we are to treat others – with mercy – no matter what their station in life is. The second half is how we live out our faith through our works – by treating others with mercy.

Reflection: Is the characteristic people would use to describe you, 'merciful'? It is not an easy characteristic to show. However, we are called to be people to show mercy, particularly to those who hurt us or mistreat us.



# I need a faith that works

## *The wonder of God's Mercy*

The two verses connect the two halves of the chapter with a beautiful picture of how the mercy of God triumphs over judgment. We deserve judgment from God because even if we have only committed one tiny sin, we are guilty of all sin. And yet, God, in His mercy, sent Jesus to earth to make a way for us to reconciled to Him. His mercy triumphs over judgment.

However, how do we discover and develop a faith with works?

When James starts talking about faith and works, he uses Abraham as an example. *"You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it*

*was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend."* James 2:22-23

When Abraham believed God, he acted on that belief. He took action by obeying what God told him to do. His belief was demonstrated through his actions, his works.

There is another illustration that teaches this spiritual truth.

If a fruit tree is healthy and alive, it bears fruit. In the same way, if our faith is alive, it bears works in step with that faith. Put another way, if our internal faith life is right, our actions will show it.

Reflection: What is the fruit of your life? How evident are the fruit of the spirit to those around you? Meditate on each one: (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, perseverance and self-control). Is there one that is lacking that needs growth?

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## *Putting our faith into action*

Faith must always be put into action in order for it to grow and develop.

Let's take time today to make a little assessment of the practicality of our faith.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How are you living out your faith in practical ways?
- Is there someone to whom you can show kindness today? Especially if that person has nothing to offer you and no benefit will come of your kindness to them.
- Is there mercy that you can extend to someone who has hurt you? Can you restrain from delivering judgment to someone who deserves it and show mercy instead?
- How would you wish to be treated today? Let's choose one person and make a difference today!

Closing prayer:

*Dear God, help us to live out our faith practically through works, especially how we treat others, no matter how much or how little they have. Help us to show mercy liberally and to draw closer and closer to You. In Jesus' name, amen.*